

NEWSIN brief

Russia appeals to UN for new MH17 probe

AP, Moscow Russia has appealed to the International Civil Aviation Organization to open a new probe into last year's downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 over eastern Ukraine, dismissing a Dutch report that said a Russian-made Buk surface-to-air missile caused the tragedy. Two-thirds of the 298 people who were killed were Dutch, and the Netherlands is conducting the investigation. Russia called the evidence presented on Tuesday "unfounded and biased."

Turkey sacks top cops after Ankara attacks

AFP, Ankara The Turkish interior ministry yesterday fired Ankara's top police chief and two other officials as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan admitted security shortcomings may have led to a double suicide bombing in the capital that killed 97 people. Announcing the first dismissals in the wake of the disaster, the interior ministry said Ankara police chief Kadri Kartal as well the head of the city's police intelligence and security departments had been sacked.

Pope issues apology over Vatican scams

AFP, Vatican City Pope Francis yesterday offered a surprise public apology from the Catholic Church for a series of scandals which have shaken the city of Rome and the Vatican. Since his election in 2013, Francis has apologised on behalf of the Church to sex abuse survivors, for the persecution of protestants in northern Italy, and for complicity in the oppression of Latin Americans during the colonial wars.

Maldives defence minister sacked

AFP, Colombo Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen has sacked his Defence Minister Moosa Ali Jaleel after a security lapse led to an alleged attempt to assassinate the leader, his spokesman said yesterday. The Maldivian leader was unhurt in a boat blast while returning to the capital from a foreign trip but his wife and two others suffered minor injuries.

India top investment destination: poll

AFP, New Delhi India has been named the most attractive country for investment in a survey of more than 500 global investors published by accounting firm EY (Ernst & Young) yesterday. Thirty-two percent of the 505 executives questioned said India was their favoured market for investment, with China second on 15 percent of the vote, followed by Southeast Asia, Brazil and North America.



Tamil protesters hold placards demanding the release of activists being held under tough anti-terror laws in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo, yesterday. Hundreds of Tamils are said to be held in detention without trial for years despite the end of the island's drawn out Tamil separatist war in May 2009. PHOTO: AFP

Obama rethinking troops pullout in Afghanistan

Say officials; residents return to Kunduz after Taliban pullback

AGENCIES With pressure building on the White House to slow or completely halt the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, senior officials said that US President Barack Obama appears increasingly willing to keep a force there large enough to carry on the hunt for al-Qaeda and Islamic State militants. For Obama, leaving more than a small force to protect the embassy in Kabul beyond next year would mean abandoning his goal to bring home almost all US troops before leaving office. But even though Obama has declared the American war in Afghanistan to be over, the Taliban's recent advances have convinced the Pentagon, many in Congress and much of the national security establishment in Washington that it is critical for US troops to remain there. The insurgents are now spread through more of Afghanistan than at any point since 2001, according to the United Nations, and last month they seized the city of Kunduz with only a few hundred fighters. At the same time, al-Qaeda operatives are still finding havens in the mountains of Afghanistan, and the Islamic State has gained a

toehold by recruiting disaffected Taliban, opening a treacherous new chapter in the war. Those developments have led the White House to become increasingly convinced of the need to keep some kind of counterterrorism force in Afghanistan. Just how large a force remains a subject of debate inside and outside the administration, said the officials. Afghan forces struggled to retake Kunduz, despite US air strikes clearing a path and American Special Operations forces at times joining the fight. The city appeared to be back in government hands on Tuesday for the first time in more than two weeks after the Taliban said they were pulling out in order to avoid, as they said in a statement, the "unnecessary waste of ammunition." Traumatized residents were slowly returning to Kunduz yesterday after the Taliban withdrawal from the northern Afghan city, but fears of a comeback by the militants loomed large even as normal life began to resume. Electricity and running water was partially restored, according to residents and officials, while some shops re-opened for business.

No plan to send military forces to Syria: China

Iranian MPs arrive in Damascus before joint offensive against 'terrorists'

REUTERS, Beijing China yesterday said it had no plans to send its military to Syria to fight with Russian forces after reports in overseas media that it was planning to do so. Chinese media has picked up Russian and Middle Eastern news reports that China would fight alongside Russia in Syria, and that China's sole aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, could participate too. Chinese media has also described these reports as speculative nonsense. "As far as I know there are no such plans," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a daily news briefing, when asked if China had or would send forces to Syria. Russia last month began air strikes on targets in Syria in a dramatic escalation of foreign involvement in the civil war. Meanwhile, a delegation of Iranian lawmakers arrived in Damascus yesterday in the build-up to a joint operation against insurgents in northwest Syria, and said US-led efforts to fight rebels had failed. The visit, led by the chairman of the Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, came as Iranian troops prepared to bolster a Syrian army offensive that two senior officials told Reuters would target rebels in Aleppo. The attack, which the officials said would be backed by Russian air strikes, underlined the growing involvement in the civil war of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's two main allies. Iran has sent thousands of troops into Syria in recent days to bolster the planned ground offensive in Aleppo, the two officials told Reuters.

Denied justice, she quits her life

Pak teen self-immolates after police deny gang-rape claim against colleagues

AFP, Multan A young Pakistani woman self-immolated after police refused to act on her claim she was gang-raped by their colleagues, officials and activists said yesterday. Two officers have been arrested after Sonia Bibi, who was in her late teens, burnt herself Tuesday outside a police station in the Muzaffargarh district of central Punjab province. She was rushed to a hospital in the central city of Multan, but died of her injuries. "Sonia had alleged that she was kidnapped and raped by two policemen but nobody registered this case despite her complaints. We have arrested the alleged rapists," said a senior police official of the district. Muzaffargarh is the same district as the village where a woman named Mukhtaran Mai was horrifically gang-raped in 2002 in an attack that made headlines around the world. Mai yesterday told AFP that she was aware of Sonia Bibi's death and said she believed the girl had been "denied justice". Physical and sexual violence against women are widespread in Pakistan, a deeply conservative, patriarchal Muslim country.



Anti-coup activists rally to mark the anniversary of the October 14, 1973 uprising at Democracy Monument in Bangkok, yesterday. Around 200 pro-democracy protesters rallied peacefully in Bangkok in defiance of the ruling junta's ban on political gatherings in one of the biggest public demonstrations since last year's coup. PHOTO: AFP

US, Russia

FROM PAGE 16 follows "basic safety procedures" over Syria.

"Even as we continue to disagree on Syria policy, we should be able to at least agree on making sure our airmen are as safe as possible," Carter said. Colonel Steve Warren, the Baghdad-based spokesman for the coalition, told reporters that Saturday's incident saw coalition and Russian planes just "miles apart" over Syria. "Visual identification took place. All pilots conducted themselves appropriately and everyone went about their business," he said.

Germany's Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier yesterday warned of the risk of a US-Russian conflict breaking out over Syria, as he readied to travel to the region. American and Russian planes are currently waging separate air campaigns over Syria targeting Islamic State militants. Steinmeier said he wanted to "urgently caution the US and Russia not to military engage in a way that in the end could lead to a conflict" between them.

Russia's intervention has raised the stakes in the Syrian conflict, which has left more than 245,000 dead and forced millions from their homes since it erupted in March 2011. Moscow insists it is targeting IS, which has emerged as the preeminent jihadist group during the conflict and seized swathes of territory in Syria and Iraq. It said yesterday that Russian jets had hit 40 IS targets in five Syrian provinces in the past 24 hours.

In Damascus on Tuesday, Russia's embassy was struck by two rockets reportedly fired from rebel-held territory on the eastern edges of the capital. There were no reports of dead or wounded. In Aleppo, the Observatory said IS had seized new territory from other rebels. It said the fighting had killed 13 IS fighters and seven rebels.

Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu yesterday warned the United States and Russia against "unacceptable" military and political support for Syrian Kurdish forces fighting IS.

Israel sets up checkpoints in E Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem Israel set up checkpoints in Palestinian neighbourhoods of annexed east Jerusalem yesterday as it struggled to stop a wave of attacks that have raised fears of a full-scale uprising. With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu under immense pressure to halt the violence and frustrated Palestinian youths defying attempts to restore calm, police said 300 Israeli soldiers were joining their patrols. The move to install checkpoints followed a decision by Netanyahu's security cabinet overnight authorising police to seal off or impose a curfew on parts of Jerusalem. Netanyahu's government announced further drastic measures, including easing firearms laws for Israelis and stripping alleged attackers from east Jerusalem of their residency permits. A wave of mainly stabbing attacks by Palestinians has spread fear in Israel, while a gun-and-knife attack on a Jerusalem bus on Tuesday killed two people and led to outrage among Israelis. A third Israeli was killed in Jerusalem on Tuesday when a Palestinian attacker rammed his car into pedestrians then exited with a knife, making it the city's bloodiest day in the current wave of unrest. All three attackers in the two incidents were from east Jerusalem, and two were shot dead. The upsurge in violence that began on October 1 has led some to warn of the risk of a third Palestinian intifada, or uprising. Seven Israelis have been killed and dozens wounded in the attacks.

Clinton fends off rivals in first debate

Democrats rally behind her over email row, spur on other issues

AFP, Las Vegas Hillary Clinton emerged unscathed Tuesday from the Democratic Party's first presidential debate, giving her renewed momentum as she gears for a showdown with Republicans over the 2012 Benghazi attack. The frontrunner cut a calm and confident figure as she parried jabs by Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont and three other hopefuls, who challenged her on everything from political U-turns to gun control and military intervention in the Middle East. "But the former secretary of state -- who took part in more than 20 debates in the 2008 White House race -- appeared mostly polished and composed during a two-hour clash in Las Vegas that was heavy on substance. An independent senator from Vermont who has drawn huge crowds on the 2016 campaign trail, Sanders

also delivered a spirited performance as he appealed to the party's left wing, urging action on climate change and attacking Wall Street. "Enough of the e-mails! The American people are sick and tired of hearing about your damn e-mails," Sanders fumed. "Thank you. Me too. Me too," the former first lady replied. The Democratic frontrunner is facing an FBI investigation after using a private email server while serving as Secretary of State from 2009 to 2013. The 67-year-old Clinton was keen to inject excitement into her campaign and show she can rally the Democratic base, while Sanders was testing whether his "political revolution" can translate to the national stage. The debate came just a week before Clinton was due to appear before a panel in the House of Representatives investigating the September 11, 2012 attacks in Benghazi, Libya that killed US ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.



Jamaican wins Man Booker prize over Bob Marley novel

AFP, London Jamaican author Marlon James on Tuesday won the Man Booker Prize for "A Brief History of Seven Killings", a re-telling of the attempted assassination of musician Bob Marley. James, 44, is the first Jamaican to win the award in its 47-year history. One of the world's most prestigious literary awards, the Man Booker Prize carries a £50,000 (67,000 euro, \$77,000) prize and winners enjoy a boost in sales and a global readership. "Oh my god, oh wow," James said as he took to the podium in dreadlocks and a tuxedo after being announced the winner at the ceremony in London. "This is so sort of ridiculous I think I'm going to wake up tomorrow and it didn't happen," he added, as he dedicated the

award to his late father. Set in James' birthplace of Kingston, the 686-page crime tale traces the rise of the drug trade on the Caribbean island and contains a chapter written in Jamaican patois. Based on real events, it recounts how Marley and his entourage were attacked just before a concert in December 1976, referring to the reggae superstar as "The Singer" throughout. "It is a crime novel that moves beyond the world of crime and takes us deep into a recent history we know far too little about," said chair of judges Michael Wood after the winner was announced. "It moves at a terrific pace and will come to be seen as a classic of our times." The New York Times had described the book as "epic in every sense of that word: sweeping, mythic, over-the-top, colossal and dizzyingly complex".

